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SUBJECT: MILITARY RENEWS OPERATIONS AS SWAT GOES FROM BAD TO WORSE

REF: 08 PESHAWAR 538

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REASON: 1.4 (d)

Summary

11. (C) Army units led by 11th Corps and supported by Frontier Corps restarted operations in Swat on February 1 with the Northwest Frontier government's acknowledgment that it has lost effective control of the district to local taliban. As many as 70 militants have reportedly been killed in clashes north of Mingora. Overall losses among security forces are unclear, but some casualties have occurred with the renewed operations. Two local NGO workers were killed while collecting wounded.

12. (C) The military's revised strategy is to have internally driven "snap actions." As many as 60,000 internally displaced persons (IDPs) have arrived in camps established in the greater Mingora area with additional IDPs beginning to arrive in Peshawar. 11th Corps has invited U.S. military representatives to visit Swat to assess what humanitarian assistance could be provided to the Pakistani military to alleviate civilian distress in the conflict zone. Frontier Corps is planning additional operations in Dir, west of Swat, in anticipation of militants' efforts to flee the area. While the current operation in Swat is a renewed attempt at re-establishing the writ of the government, it is unclear if the implementation of the "snap actions" strategy will also have an effective hold phase. End Summary

Fazlullah Terrorizing Swat

13. (C) Since the beginning of 2009, militants led by Swat Taliban leader Maulana Fazlullah have extended their control over Swat, a district of the Northwest Frontier Province (NWFP) located about 90 miles from Islamabad. Fazlullah is loosely allied with Taliban militants from the FATA, and his tactics have even led his father-in-law Tehreek Nafaz Shariat Mohammadi's (TNSM) leader Sufi Mohammed to disown him. Fazlullah's Taliban announced that girls could receive either no education or only through grade four, banned women from marketplaces and shops, continued to threaten CD and barbers shops, and established several parallel courts to disburse their version of sharia law. A local religious leader who tried to resist Fazlullah was killed and his beheaded body appeared in a

village square. According to the NWFP Inspector General of Police Malik Naveed, over 600 specially trained police (including specially trained elite forces) have deserted or refused duty posts in Swat leaving the local population to fend for themselves. In 2008, over 70 police officers were killed and 150 were wounded in Swat. Reports from the area indicate the militants are deforesting the area (known as little as three years ago as a tourist destination) and seizing orchards, a prime source of livelihood. The Swat area has largely become a "no-go" area even for local politicians, with ruling coalition partner Awami National Party (ANP) leaders announcing ultimatums from Peshawar but not being in any position to implement them. On January 27, the ANP admitted that its provincial government had lost its writ in Swat.

¶4. (C) On January 26, Fazlullah's FM radio broadcast released a list of 46 people wanted before his sharia courts, including former and sitting ministers and members of parliament. Fazlullah also announced that if these people did not stop their opposition to the Swat taliban, they would face death. Fazlullah uses his infamous FM broadcasts to spread his violent message and to scare local residents. The broadcast, which starts at 8 every night, outlines newly proscribed "un-Islamic" activities and announces the names of people the Taliban have recently killed or those they plan to kill.

¶5. (C) In response, there has been a growing chorus of protests in parliament, in street demonstrations, and in the media calling upon the GOP to take control of Swat. The 11th Corps, which as of early January told us that it had all but written off Swat as being under militant control, has now been forced to respond. Since January 26, security forces have announced a 24-hour curfew in much of Swat. In addition, Interior Minister Rehman Malik announced on January 30 that the government planned to flush Swat of all militants within weeks.

Renewed Swat Operations

¶6. (C) Army units led by 11th Corps and supported by Frontier Corps began operations in Swat on February 1. While details are sketchy, elements from two brigades of the 37th Division, headquartered in Dir were accompanied by forces from four wings of the Frontier Corps in operations near Mingora. (Note: A wing is approximately 650 men. End note.) According to the Pakistan military, since July 2008 the military has led seven major operations in Swat.

¶7. (C) As many as 70 militants were reportedly killed in clashes north of Mingora since February 1. NWFP Governor Ghani told Principal Officer that nine soldiers were killed on February 2 while attempting to assist a police post that had been surrounded by militants at Barikot (15 km south of Mingora). Other security forces' casualties are unclear.

¶8. (C) Contacts at 11th Corps maintain that law enforcement agencies have successfully linked up the northern and southern portions of the Swat valley and "dominate" the main roads. However, local contacts who traveled on the main road north of Mingora in early February, told Pol/Econ Chief that militant check points above Charbagh (approximately 10 km north of Mingora) were still present, some in view of government check posts along the main road. To check militant influence in the "built up" areas such as Mingora as well as further north, 11th Corps Commander General Masood described to Ambassador a revised strategy of "snap actions" that would respond rapidly to hot spots in the district such as local taliban court and punishment sessions.

60,000 Internally Displaced Persons

¶8. (C) As many as 60,000 new internally displaced persons (IDPs) have arrived in informal camps established in the greater Mingora area with additional IDPs from Swat beginning to arrive in the greater Peshawar area according to USAID contacts. The International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) received

permission on February 6 to begin working up to Mingora and is preparing to assist the latest flow of IDPs. Post understands that World Food Program is planning to deliver food to Mingora. Prior to the start of the operation, an undetermined number of IDPs were moving around inside Swat, as fighting ebbed and flowed, but few had fled to other districts; most stayed with families or friends in areas not yet hit by military operations. Over 33,000 IDPs were registered with UNHCR in various locations outside of Swat as of February 2.

NGO Staff Killed

¶9. (C) According to Medecins Sans Frontieres (MSF), two of its local staff doctors were killed on February 1 while collecting injured people in an ambulance during fighting near Charbagh. MSF has completely suspended its medical activities in Swat, including all life-saving operations. An ICRC contact said that their understanding was that the MSF ambulances had been caught in the crossfire of a gun battle that ended up lasting nearly seven hours, and that MSF itself had not been targeted. However, he did not exclude the possibility that militants were concerned ambulances were being used to transport things other than people or medical supplies, and therefore were beginning to be targeted.

11th Corps Invitation

¶10. (C) During a February 3 meeting between 11th Corps Chief of Staff Brigadier Aamer and Peshawar Principal Officer with Special Forces and Border Assistance Coordinator in attendance, the Chief of Staff invited U.S. military to visit Swat immediately to assess what kind of humanitarian assistance could be provided to help the Pakistani military respond to civilian needs in conflict zones. Aamer noted that there are significant humanitarian needs where operations are taking place, but that the fighting had made it extremely difficult for civilian agencies to access these areas. (Note: We are pursuing this invitation, which is unprecedented and a complete turn around from a year ago when 11th Corps stalled on our requests for access to Swat to assess assistance needs.)

Operation In Dir Next?

¶11. (C) Frontier Corps is planning additional operations in Dir, west of Swat, in anticipation of militants' efforts to flee the area. When and with what forces the Dir operation will use has yet to be determined. Local observers have expressed concern that militants are filtering as far south as Chakdarra and Bathkela (approximately 40 km south of Mingora) to launch attacks. These locations control a key road junction where the Swat and Dir valleys split off. Militant dominance of these points could impede the ability to move assets into Swat from its headquarters at Timergara in Dir as well as giving militants improved access into Bajaur. In Upper Dir, there are reports that militants are using an illegal FM radio station to broadcast a call "to join jihad" and to issue a list of "ten most wanted" individuals.

Comment

¶12. (C) While the current operation in Swat appears to be a renewed attempt at reestablishing the writ of the government, it is unclear if the implementation of the "snap actions" strategy will be followed by an effective hold phase. The population of Swat is likely to be skeptical of the government's long term commitment to their security given the perceived lack of determination by the GOP concerning Swat over the last two years. The residents of Swat have repeatedly experienced the return of militants as soon as the military pulls out. Local and provincial politicians see the solution as three fold: return of law and order, implementation of speedy justice (whether it is named sharia or not), and economic development. However, in order to implement any long-lasting solutions, the GOP must have police and civilian infrastructure ready to assist

the local population and establish the writ of government when the military finishes its operations.

TRACY